



NEWS

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This is an unofficial announcement of Commission action. Release of the full text of a Commission order constitutes official action.
See MCI v. FCC, 515 F 2d 385 (D.C. Circ 1974).

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FCC OPENS PROCEEDING REGARDING MITIGATION OF ORBITAL DEBRIS

Washington, DC – Today, the Federal Communications Commission (Commission) opened a new proceeding regarding orbital debris. Minimization of orbital debris will help maximize the usefulness of space for satellite communications and other services.

Today's Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (NPRM) proposes to adopt a requirement that all FCC-licensed satellite systems submit information concerning plans to mitigate orbital debris. Orbital debris consists of artificial objects orbiting the Earth that are not functional spacecraft. Other U.S. agencies have addressed orbital debris mitigation and generally, only the FCC is responsible for authorizing nongovernment satellites. To date, the Commission has addressed orbital debris on a case-by-case basis, requiring some satellite systems to provide information and reviewing disposal measures of some systems. The NPRM seeks to address orbital debris in a systematic way. It describes U.S. Government orbital debris guidelines that today do not apply to the satellites the FCC authorizes, and seeks comment on applicability of those guidelines.

Since human activity in space began decades ago, there has been steady growth in the number of artificial objects in orbit around the Earth. Studies show that continued increase in orbital debris may raise concerns regarding the reliability and cost of space activities, including satellite communications. The satellites of tomorrow are being built today. Some steps, if taken now, can reduce the growth of orbital debris.

Action by the Commission March 14, 2002, by Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (FCC 02-80). Chairman Powell, Commissioners Abernathy, Copps and Martin, with Commissioner Copps issuing a separate statement.

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